



MARYLAND'S
VACCINE
EQUITY
TASK FORCE

MOBILE VACCINATIONS BRIDGE THE GAP



JUNE 17, 2021

BY SPC THOMAS LAMB

It was a clear spring morning, nothing but the sounds of cicadas and birds in the air. A few people did their morning prayers inside the Islamic Community Center of Potomac. All in all a tranquil Sunday morning before the mobile vaccine bus arrived. The bus brought with it 15 Maryland National Guard members, ready to provide the COVID-19 vaccine to anyone who wanted it. They immediately got to work, sanitizing tables inside the center, setting up signs by the road and coordinating with the leaders of the community center who initially requested the vaccination team.

"I know it was harder in the beginning to get [to a mass vaccination site]," said Staff Sgt. Brittany McFadden, a combat medic specialist with the 224th Medical Company Area Support. "So when we went to these [mobile vaccine] bus missions, we were reaching more communities that, maybe, didn't want to go to those different sites and are more comfortable in their community centers."

There has been a lot of effort to get Marylanders vaccinated, but one unique program, the Mobile Vaccination Support Team, is entirely operated by the Maryland National Guard. The program focuses on going into communities that may have difficulty going to get vaccinated because of



transportation or employment concerns and brings the vaccine to them at a convenient time and place.

On Sunday, June 6, 2021 the MVST was at the ICCP. "The National Guard is doing a wonderful job [with the response to COVID-19] and when I learned that the National Guard was going to have a vaccine camp at ICCP I welcomed it," said Zamrooda Ahad, the managing administrator for ICCP. "I was so happy to see and meet [the service members here today]. It is an honor, actually, to have you in our community."

One person who



made the event possible, Cindy Conant, a food bank volunteer that has now set up two events with the MVST, says events like this might have a big impact on the vaccination rate in hesitant communities.

"I had this idea, especially now that the guard all can bring Pfizer and anyone over 12 years old can get vaccinated, that I really feel like in a lot of families, the kids are going to be more eager to be vaccinated [than their parents]," said Conant. "And I feel like some of the kids could sort of be a driving force for the whole family. So that's my hope."

After setting up in the community center, people started to come in to get vaccinated. The first person vaccinated during the event was 13 year old Jamal Khadar. He expressed excitement about getting back to socializing with his friends. Bringing the vaccine to the community also allowed an expecting mother to get vaccinated without waiting for hours in her car.



The main benefit of the MVST is bringing the vaccine to people who had limited access to it before. The mobile vaccine bus is just one part of the Vaccine Equity Task Force and has brought vaccines to worship centers, apartment complexes and community centers all over Maryland. The VETF has helped administer 120,000 doses of the vaccine, elevating Maryland's Black and minority vaccination rates to fourth in the country.

If you are part of a community that could benefit from mobile vaccination support, please contact the Maryland COVID-19 vaccine support center at 855-MDGOVAX (855-634-6829) or go to <https://massvax.maryland.gov> for more information or to find a vaccination clinic near you.

JAN 29

Gov. Hogan announce Brig. Gen. Janeen Birkhead will lead the Maryland Vaccine Equity Task Force (VETF).



FEB 26

Lt. Gov. Rutherford visit faith-based VETF vaccine clinics at Kingdome Fellowship AME in Silver Springs and Sagrado Corazón de Jesús in Baltimore.



MDNG supports Maryland's first mass vaccination site at Six Flags in Prince George's county.

FEB 6

MAR 28



Brig. Gen. Birkhead visit the VETF supported Islamic Center of Maryland's vaccine clinic in Gaithersburg.



APR 5

Maryland ranks number **#3** in the nation among the percentage of Black residents vaccinated.



The first Faith Leaders Unite event is held at M&T Bank Stadium to recognize the role of the faith-based community in vaccine distribution.

APR 6

APR 10

The VETF assist the Piscataway-Conoy tribe in Charles county with a pop-up vaccine clinic.



APR 14

Gov. Hogan and First Lady Hogan visit Howard County faith-based VETF pop-up vaccine clinics at Bridgeway Church and Bethel Korean Presbyterian Church.





JUNE 16, 2021 BY SGT ARCADIA HAMMACK

“I was contemplating getting the vaccine,” said Robert Johnson, shrugging his shoulders. “I have lived in the Parks Height/Randallstown area since the 60’s, and I haven’t been vaccinated since.”

Johnson was notorious for his disbelief in vaccines, but back at home, his wife has some underlying health conditions. She fears of contracting COVID-19 and received the vaccine as soon as she could. Johnson, on the other hand, was opposed.



As a custodian contractor with CHIMES at the Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport, an intervening-opportunity came about.

CHIMES, a not-for-profit organization based in Baltimore, Maryland, provides a wide array

of services for people with intellectual and behavioral challenges. This includes assisting with employment, like some of the CHIMES contractors who work at BWI.

It was 7:30 a.m. on a slow Monday morning at the International Terminal at BWI, when Maryland National Guard members of Maryland’s Vaccine Equity Task Force, and a medical professional from Safeway, a local supermarket, began to set-up their COVID-19 vaccination clinic.

Safeway and VETF partnered together at BWI on May 17, 2021, to vaccinate members of CHIMES during their shifts. It was fairly quiet, as the international terminal was empty. Distant voices and miscellaneous noises could be heard from the other side of the concourse at the ticketing section where all of the travelers were.

A CHIMES worker coming off night-shift could be found sleeping on a bench nearby, waiting for the vaccination clinic to open.

“Our mission here today is to spread the equity for these vaccines,” said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ralphael Smith, a member of Maryland National Guard Medical Detachment supporting the VETF. “We know some folks have a hard time getting to places to get vaccinated, so we’re here helping to get CHIMES [employees] who work here to get vaccinated.”

Just past 8 a.m., CHIMES employees began filing through the registration lines and questionnaires. Johnson wearily, but confidently, approaches the clinic. After seeing how the pandemic has affected his wife and after having some conversations, he ultimately decided that the benefits of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine outweighed his doubts.

“I was talking to my wife, and I want her to feel comfortable,” said Johnson. “If I get a shot, she has the shot, we’re both protected. I was going to make proper procedures to get it done anyway, but then my job offered it here thanks to you all.

I don’t have to run around the city. wait in line, get denied, get frustrated. This worked for me since I am working from 6a.m. – 2 p.m. anyway, so it was made simple.”

Now that Johnson received the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine, he plans to show his wife his vaccination card, and her world will feel much safer.

The Maryland National Guard will continue to support Maryland’s COVID-19 response by providing direct support to county health

departments, local organizations and faith-based organizations in order to ensure vaccine equity throughout the state, leaving no arms behind.



APR 18

The Boys & Girls Club of Washington County and the Elgin Station Community Center host vaccine clinic with the VETF.



APR 23



VETF support CASA Wheaton Latinx community vaccination clinic in Prince George’s county.

APR 30

The VETF assist with Morgan State University’s weekly neighborhood vaccine clinic.



MAY 10



VETF assist Pimlico horse racing community ahead of Preakness Stakes.

MAY 13

The second Faith Leaders Unite event is held at FedEx Field Stadium to recognize the role of the faith-based community in vaccine distribution.



MAY 17

MAY 20

Maryland ranks **#9** in the nation among the percentage of its population that is fully vaccinated.

100K
VACCINATIONS

MAY 23



The VETF support mobile vaccine clinic on Eastern Shore’s Deal Island.



VACCINE EQUITY TASK FORCE INCREASED STATEWIDE VACCINATION DISTRIBUTION BY THOUSANDS

JUNE 16, 2021

BY TECH SGT. ENJOLI SAUNDERS

In early 2020 when coronavirus cases began to gradually increase within the United States and around the world, the pandemic officially created a state of emergency. Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan activated the Maryland National Guard to assist in minimizing the spread of the virus by setting up testing sites, distributing information, and provided logistical support to ensure Marylanders had access to available resources. Throughout the months that followed, the MDNG continued to offer support to both state and federal government agencies.

When the vaccine became available for distribution in January 2021, once again the MDNG sprang into action. While mass vaccination sites were being opened at strategic locations across the state so large numbers of citizens could receive the vaccine, those in rural or impoverished areas did not have equitable access to those sites.

"It's very important to work with our local community, especially our minority populations because we want to make sure there is equity

in vaccine distribution," said Dr. Dianna Abney, Health Officer for the Charles County Department of Health. "Additionally, we have found that minority populations are more affected by COVID-19."

One of the most significant initiatives to distribute the vaccine equitably across the state was to stand-up the Vaccine Equity Task Force (VETF). When the idea was first introduced, Hogan asked U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Janeen Birkhead, commander of the Maryland Army National Guard, to lead the initiative.

"This is something I asked her to do back in the first week of January," stated Gov. Larry Hogan. "She immediately and readily accepted this next mission. She and her team have been working tirelessly with health officials, local leaders, and other partners and stakeholders. We [Maryland] are very grateful for her leadership."

The need for the VETF was discovered when areas of citizens were not being vaccinated at the mass vaccination sites due to transportation

challenges, language barriers, or misinformation. The task force was designed to address these issues and encourage people to get vaccinated as well as provide resources. This effort was supported by Mobile Vaccination Support Teams (MVST) consisting of MDNG Soldiers and Airmen created to deploy as self-sufficient medical units that could distribute and administer the vaccine. Expectations for the VETF included assisting citizens with overcoming barriers of mistrust of the vaccine as well as vaccine hesitancy by expanding vaccine access and education to those in underserved, vulnerable, and hard-to-reach communities.

"I expect the task force will have a long-lasting effect on health and health equity across the state," said Birkhead. "And that's getting into communities that we haven't been into before and building trust in those communities. We continuously work on community immunity by bringing the vaccine to people where they are."

As access to the vaccine continued to be an issue for certain communities MDNG members supported various local pop-up community test and vaccination sites set up in counties across the state. This effort was supported by a bus equipped with medical supplies including a space to vaccinate and an MVST. Additional support for the pop-ups was received from professional medical members of the Maryland Defense Force, an entity of the Maryland Military Department.

"Being able to be a part of the VETF and serve the community, specifically the Latin community

has been amazing," said U.S. Army Pfc. Josselin Maribel Panameno, a data analyst with the Vaccine Equity Task Force. "Communicating with the community in Spanish helped to send a clear message of how the vaccine could help us get back to normal. My role as a translator may have made the difference between someone choosing to get vaccinated or not."

The VETF was the first of its kind throughout all 50 states and the only task force to be led by an army general in command of a state national guard. Since inception, the VETF has completed more than 100 missions leading to the distribution of over 150,000 vaccines. The task force has supported vaccine distribution in a large percentage of counties in Maryland.

While the work of the task force is still not done, the success achieved thus far validated the significance of the initiative. The VETF continues to push for citizens of Maryland to get vaccinated before the school year begins. However, the efforts do not stop with the withdrawal of MDNG VETF participation, the VETF will be transitioning the program to the Maryland Department of Health who will continue encouraging and offering vaccinations. Local health departments will continue providing free clinics for vaccinations for the public.



JUN 15

VETF support vaccine clinic for largest Latinx community at Mega Mart in Prince George's county.

JUN 21

JUN 26

The VETF support Cottage City Police Department vaccine clinic in Prince George's county.

JUN 21

JUN 29

The third Faith Leaders Unite event is held at Regency Stadium to recognize the role of the faith-based community in vaccine distribution.

JUL 6

JUL 19

896 VETF mission in progress with faith-based and community organizations.

JUL 19

JUL 19

Ranked #7 for percentage of Asian Americans vaccinated health depts.

AUG 17

SEP 1

The Maryland Department of Health takeover Maryland Vaccine Equity Task Force operations.



“EQUITY MATTERS”

The Vaccine Equity Task Force partnered with local health department and community stakeholders to bridge the health outcome divide throughout the State and to increase Marylanders' access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

